



Montana Main Street A Case Study Promotion

Copper King Express Anaconda, Montana

For much of the 1900's, the community of Anaconda was recognized as a major contributor to our nation's industrial output. A vast amount of our nation's copper was produced in the smelter operated by the Anaconda Company. This copper provided the wires and pipes that would propel the United States into the forefront of world economies.

The community of Anaconda is easily identified by the towering Anaconda Company smokestack. Travelers on Interstate 90 can still see the world's tallest free standing masonry structure even though the smokestack is over 6 miles away!

When the Atlantic Richfield Company, the successor to the Anaconda Company, chose to close the Smelter in the early 1980's, Anaconda faced a very uncertain future. Many predicted Anaconda would become a ghost town by the end of the decade. In the twenty plus years since the closure of the smelter, Anaconda continues to feel the effects of the closure. A popular mercantile store in downtown Anaconda closed their doors in 2004 after 80+ years in business.

In an effort to bring visitors back to Anaconda, a 26 mile railroad owned by Anaconda natives, the McCarthy family, was used for the creation of an excursion train. Given the important history of the Anaconda area and beautiful scenery of Durant Canyon, the McCarthy family felt that an excursion train would help reinvigorate the community. In 2005, Rarus Railway Company began creating the excursion train that would be named the "Copper King Express". The process to create an excursion train was a monumental task. Not only did Rarus need to seek various government approvals, logistical issues also needed to be overcome. Where would passengers load the train? How will the train be staffed? What type of publications should be used for advertising? When should the train operate?

A number of factors assisted Rarus in making the new excursion train successful. The Butte, Anaconda & Pacific Railway is historically significant as the first railroad in the United States to be electrified at 2400 volts. This technological development by the B.A.&P. was a major factor in the nation's transition from steam engines to diesel-electric locomotives. The B.A.&P. was also the link between the historic cities of Butte and Anaconda. The copper ore was mined in Butte but the ore was processed in the Anaconda smelter. Marcus Daly owned the smelter and also many of the copper mines. To link his mining and smelting, he created the B.A.&P in 1892. Rarus continues to operate over the same 26 miles of track created over 100 years ago.

In the late 1980's, a number of B.A.&P. buildings were being considered for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. After much consideration by the Historic Preservation Office, they determined that the entire 26 miles of railroad should be listed on the National Register. Recently, the railroad received additional distinction as a National Historic Landmark District.

The Copper King Express operates between Anaconda and Butte. The route includes a picturesque journey through Durant Canyon. In the 1860's and 1870's, Durant Canyon was home to over 1,000 gold miners. Today, the only inhabitants are elk, deer and moose. Passengers are treated to rugged scenery that can only be accessed by the railroad.

In the inaugural year of 2006, the Copper King Express has been a resounding success! Although the season is not yet complete, they expect to carry around 8,000 passengers this year! Of 36 trains through August 13, only one train was not sold out! With 18 additional trains scheduled for the remainder of the year, there are only 3 days with seats still available. A 2007 expansion is under consideration.

For more information about the Copper King Express, contact Anaconda Main Street at 406-563-3735.

For information on the Montana Main Street Program, call 406-841-2756

